An Experimental inquiry into the Cathartic Properties of the Podophyllum ~ Peltatum

By

Godwin Cotten Moore
of
North Carolina

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Gray

Philadelphia
1825

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It has ever been to me a subject both of astonishment and regret, that the virtues of our own indigenous plants have not been more attended to and their application to the management of disease more general. Let us but cast our eyes over the pages of any late popular work on the subject of Materia Medica, and how few are the articles there mentioned that we recognize as the production of the United States. Few indeed they are, but in this little number we claim to have made some of the most valuable contributions of any Country since the introduction of this subject to the world. Should this not urge us to hope that by investigating the properties of those plants that ornament our hills and Valleys many are yet in reserve to reward the diligence of any who may turn their attention to this object, and that the day is not far distant, when we shall be as independent of the old world for our resources in medicine as we are in our institutions or government. Is not the climate of the United States as propitious as that of any other section of the habitable world? Are not her lands as congenial to the growth of the vegetable creation? Here it is that in all that extin-

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-sive tract of Country stretching from Main to Georgia from the Atlantic to the Pacific we may find a region adapted to the production of such articles as we receive from the pleasant plains of France or Spain or from cold and inhospitable Siberia or Sweden. What an ample field is then opened to the speculative and experimentalist in the abundance and variety of the productions of our land. Perhaps in the secluded valley or mountainous precipice some articles are yet to be discovered possessed of powers capable of reaching the seat of some of those diseases that now stand in the list of the opprobria medicorum, and as monuments of the inefficacy of our art. Is it rational to suppose that our country which nature has thrown in her most magnificent and beautiful mould, should be stinted or niggardly in her articles adapted to remedial purposes? And if our Rivers, Lakes, Plains and Mountains speak an approach to perfection, we cannot for a moment suppose that the work is defective in the vegitable part of Creation. ~~&c~~

Having offered these few introductory remarks I propose to give in the following lines the result of a course of experiments made with

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one of our own indigenous roots in contrast with an article of high and deserved celebrity as a cathartic — the latter being also an inhabitant of the new world, but not of that portion included within the boundaries of the United States. The articles in question are the Podophyllum Pellatum and Convolvulus Jalapa. These experiments I respectfully submit to my able and very distinguished instructors being confident, that no attention or exertion on my part has been wanting to render them as accurate as the nature of the case would permit — giving to each a fair and unprejudiced trial.

The Convs Jalapa or the plant hitherto described by Linnaeus, Willdenow, Woodville and others by this title was first discovered, growing near the city Jalapa in Mexico — it was afterwards supposed to be an inhabitant of the United States also; as identified with the Ipomaea Mecrorhiza of Michaux the father. Of the truth of this identity

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I shall not pretend to determine, but leave it to those more skilled in the Botanical history of the article under consideration. Having been introduced into the Materia Medica it became an object of considerable Medical research and, has from that time down to the present supported an unimpeached reputation. Its sensible properties are thus described by a distinguished Professor. "It is brought to us in thin transverse slices, which are covered with a blackish wrinkled bark, are of a dark grey colour internally, marked with darker or blackish stripes. It has a nauseous smell and taste; and when swallowed it affects the throat with a sense of heat and occasions a plentiful discharge of Saliva. When powdered it has a yellowish grey colour,,, and combined with Calomel it is a remedy of undoubted utility in many of the diseases to which our climate is subject. Per se it is subject to some disadvantages disagreeable in their nature: such as gaping and

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